

The Truth by **halfbloodjames**

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Summary:

Joyce and Hopper have known each other a long time but even old friends have their secrets. Also posted on FF.

1. Son

Seeing the chief's Blazer in the driveway had become so commonplace at the Byer's house that as Jonathan pulled in, he was worried by its absence. Although with what had happened in the past couple years, he was always worried by the slightest thing out of place. He shrugged it off, walking into the house.

"Hey, Mom, I'm home," Jonathan said, dropping his bag of books that hadn't quite been studied even though that had been his excuse when he said he was going to the Wheelers'.

Joyce poked her head out of the kitchen, shushing him and pointing to the couch where Will and his friends were all slumped together under a blanket like a dozing six headed monster, a cheesy horror movie playing quietly on the TV.

"You got them all knocked out by midnight? Impressive." Jonathan said, sitting down in front of the dinner plate Joyce had covered in plastic for him. He noted another, untouched one across from him. "El's here, where's Hop?" He asked.

"Work emergency, he said," Joyce explained, biting her nail. Much like Jonathan, she got worried at the slightest thing out of place now. She liked to complain about the messes Will and his friends made but Jonathan knew she would let them all live at the Byers' house permanently if it meant she could keep them all safe. Jonathan reached out, patting his mom's hand. She relaxed a little, giving him a soft smile.

It wasn't "official", but the kids, as well as the whole town, knew that for all intents and purposes, Hop and his mother were together in every sense that they could be without actually being married. They tried to keep it from their children, but Jonathan knew Hop hadn't exactly been sleeping on the floor when he stepped out of Joyce's room in the mornings.

Their calm moment was shattered by the loud turning of gravel outside. They heard the kids on the couch wake abruptly as a car door slammed shut. Joyce and Jonathan hurried outside, motioning a

warning to the kids to stay put which Jonathan knew they wouldn't heed.

Jonathan was relieved, albeit annoyed, to see it was only Lonnie's car parked crookedly and dangerously close to his in the driveway. Lonnie braced himself against his Oldsmobile, vomiting onto the grass. Joyce sighed, clearly just as glad that it was just her ex husband sloppy drunk and not a bunch of government suits there to take one of her children.

"Lonnie, what are you doing here?" She asked, pushing Jonathan behind her. He knew she was trying to tell him to go back inside, but much like the little faces peeking through the window, Jonathan wasn't going to listen.

"I'm here," Lonnie slurred, wiping sick off his face with the sleeve of his jacket. "To see my son." He shot a quick glare at Jonathan but turned back to Joyce.

"You drove all the way to Hawkins in the middle of the night to see your son?" Joyce asked, half laughing. "Where were you the last year, Lonnie?"

"I'm here now, alright? Where is he?" Lonnie asked. He clearly was too drunk to notice Will watching them from inside the house.

"Go away, Lonnie," Joyce said, crossing her arms. "If you want to see the boys you can come back when you aren't hammered."

"I just want to see mine," Lonnie said, once again glaring at Jonathan..

The headlights cut off Lonnie's anger for a brief moment as Hop pulled in. "Figured this is where you'd head, Lonnie." The chief said, stepping out of his Blazer.

"Of course I would, this is my house, ain't it?"

"Not anymore," Hop corrected.

"No, I suppose not, huh, Hopper?" Lonnie said, a wicked grin on his face. "I heard from Old Joe you're here all the time. Wasn't enough

for you to just fuck my wife, you gotta stake your claim on my house too?"

"I'm not your wife anymore," Joyce said, stepping closer to Lonnie as if her tiny stature might frighten him back into his car. Instead, it seemed to just strengthen his resolve. Jonathan put his hand on his mother's shoulder, pulling her back. Lonnie had been known to be violent.

"Sorry, Joyce is right, but then again, you'd already been fucking my wife."

"Christ, Lonnie," Hop said. "The kids can hear you, stop it."

"Just go home, man," Jonathan said.

"I don't want to hear it from you," Lonnie said, boring into him with that hateful stare once again.

"We don't want to see you," Jonathan continued, sounding much more confident than he felt. "Will doesn't want to see you. He's been fine without you. Better."

Lonnie lunged at him, moving like he was going to grab at his throat, but Hop grabbed the much smaller man by the collar and slammed him against his own car.

"Don't you fucking touch him," Hop growled, his face inches from Lonnie's.

"What, Hopper, got a special interest in the little shit?" Lonnie spat with a resentful grin. "He's all yours if you want him."

"Jesus, Lonnie, I know you're a fuck up," Hop said. "But that's still your kid."

"Oh, is it?" Lonnie asked with sarcastic surprise.

"Just go home, I don't want to arrest you."

"Yeah, you do."

"You're right, I do," Hop said, shoving Lonnie's shoulder back against the Oldsmobile. "But I'm not going to because your kids are watching. Now go the hell home and stay there."

As Lonnie got into the car, Jonathan felt a lump in his throat. Lonnie had never been Father of the Year, and he clearly favored Will (if you could call missed birthdays and half assed presents weeks later favoring), but Jonathan always thought it was just because he stood up to his father and defended his brother when Lonnie decided to turn on even his favorite son. Now, though, Lonnie's question of "is it?" rang through his head as he followed his mom back inside.

"Come on," Hop said to the kids as they scrambled back to the couch to pretend they weren't listening. "It's way past your bedtimes."

"It's a Friday, Chief," Mike complained.

"I'm not afraid to cuff you, Wheeler," Hop said, hands firmly on his hips. "Now. Bed."

The six grumbled but dragged their blankets into Will's bedroom where they would most likely stay up for another hour telling stories.

"I'll heat your dinner up," Joyce said, touching Hop's arm gently. He gave her a tight grin.

Jonathan sat on the couch and Hop plopped onto the other end, rubbing his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. "Thanks for getting him out of here," Jonathan said after a moment.

"No problem, kid," Hop said. "I'm sorry you had to deal with him like that."

"I'm used to him like that," Jonathan laughed sadly. "But about what he said-,"

"I'm sorry about that too," Hop said. "He's an ass. You and your brother are good boys. He should be proud you're his kids but instead he treats you like that."

"No, I mean," Jonathan breathed in. "What he was saying. Why he was saying it."

"That he wanted to see Will?" Hop asked. "Yeah, after a year and a half, he shows up, I was wondering that too."

"That's just his typical bullshit," Jonathan said, losing his nerve. Hop clearly wasn't getting his question and Jonathan wasn't going to spell it out for him. Even if he had known Hop his whole life, '*hey, are you actually my dad?*', seemed a bit heavy to just drop on someone.

"Yeah, he used to be just one of your run of the mill douchebags," Hop said. "But he's really blossomed since high school."

"You and my mom were dating back then, right?" Jonathan asked. He had never heard it from either of them, just small town talk that got around.

Hop laughed. "Nah, I wish. I wanted to date her, but she wasn't about that kind of thing. We were just-," Hopper stopped short and cleared his throat, remembering who he was talking to. "We were just good friends."

"That's too bad," Jonathan shrugged, getting up. "You would've been better for her than Lonnie."

2. Father

"Come in and eat," Joyce called from the kitchen. Hop watched Jonathan walk into his room, thinking that the boy was acting a bit strange, but he supposed that was to be expected. Hearing your father tell you that you mean nothing to him is bound to make someone a little off.

Hop walked into the kitchen sitting down in front of the plate Joyce had sat down for him. She squeezed his shoulder, giving him her sad smile like she always did when she was worried but wasn't trying to let anyone know. Hop pulled her down to kiss her. Her tension seemed to lessen, but not by much.

"He's gonna be fine, Joyce," Hop assured as she sat down next to him.

"Did he go to bed?" Joyce asked, looking out towards the living room. Hop nodded, shoveling mashed potatoes into his mouth. "I can't believe Lonnie would say that stuff to him."

"You can't?"

"Okay, well, I can," Joyce said, wringing her hands. "I just...I hate that I let him do it for so long to him. I should've seen it."

Hop reached out and grabbed her hands, his one covering her small two, stopping her from pulling her own fingers off. "Joyce, stop. You kicked him out a long time ago. Lonnie's not your fault." Joyce nodded, clearly unconvinced.

Hop didn't want to say 'I told you so', but he wished he could show what Lonnie did tonight, or any of the nights when Hop had to be called to the Byers house by the boys, to Joyce when they were younger, to show her what Lonnie was going to turn into.

The hallways were all clear, meaning Hop was free to smoke his cigarette in peace, but that wasn't what he was waiting there in the stairwell for. He checked his watch, knowing that he only had another ten minutes before Mr. Cooper came looking for him.

"Hey, Jimmy," Hop relaxed for a moment, seeing Joyce Rider, the beautiful brunette who had told him to meet her in their normal spot.

"You only call me Jimmy when something bad happens," Hop pointed out. He noted her eyes were red and puffy, despite her warm smile.

"I guess I do," Joyce said. "We gotta talk."

"I know, I got your note, that's why I'm here," Hop said, offering her the cigarette. She waved it off. "Now, you don't smoke either?"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Hop," Joyce said, her voice taking an edge Hop had never heard before.

"That what?" He asked. "You're gonna quit smoking?"

"No," Joyce said, wrapping her arms around herself and looking down. Hop had known Joyce his whole life, he knew something was very off.

"Joyce, what's going on? Are you okay?" Hop asked.

"I'm fine," Joyce said, wiping the tears that formed with the back of her hand. She took a deep breath before saying, "I told you to meet me here because I wanted to tell you I'm pregnant," She said, speaking slowly and clearly as if she had rehearsed it.

"You're what now?"

"I'm pregnant, Hop, like with a baby. I'm going to have a baby."

Hop took a step back as if he had been punched in the gut. He ran his hand over his mouth and then through his hair. Nodding as he formulated a plan in his head. "Okay, okay."

"What?" Joyce asked, confused. "Okay what, Hop?"

"Okay," Hop repeated, grabbing her arm gently. "This is fine. We graduate in a month, we'll be out of school and I can work for the police department here."

Joyce's face drained of all color. "You would take a job here? You want to move to New York, be a detective. This is Hawkins, nothing happens

here."

"So?"

"So?" Joyce repeated, snapping her arm back from him. "So I'm not going to let you give up your life for me."

"I wouldn't be giving up my life, Joyce," Hop said. "And it wouldn't just be for you, it'd be for the baby too."

"It's not yours, Hop," Joyce said, her eyes squeezed shut.

"What? What do you mean it's not mine?" Hop said, his voice cracking.

"I mean it's not yours," she said. "I'm only two months along, it can't be yours."

"It's not mine," Hop said quietly, not quite looking at Joyce, more like he was telling himself.

"I told you, I slept with Lonnie Byers after we broke up."

"Oh, so we broke up now? I thought we weren't dating?" Hop asked.

"Fine, when we stopped sleeping together. Is that what's important right now? It's not yours, it's Byers'."

"Fine, it's not mine, but I'm for damn sure not letting you raise this kid by yourself."

"We aren't together," Joyce said. "You don't have to pretend you care."

"Who's pretending?"

"Even if the baby isn't yours, you'd give everything up?"

"Of course, Joyce. You're my best friend and I know Lonnie Byers isn't going to help you. Like I said. We graduate in a month. We'll be out of school. I'll get a job. You're not doing this alone. I love you, I always have. We're in this together."

"No," Joyce said firmly. "I don't love you, not like that. I'm doing this alone, I don't need your help. It's my decision."

"You're thinking again," Joyce said, pulling Hop out of his mental rewind.

"I do that sometimes."

"What about?" She asked.

"When you told me you were pregnant with Jonathan," Hop said, giving her a pained smile. He knew she hated thinking about it as much as he did, but they promised each other a long time ago they would never lie to each other, even if it hurt.

Joyce squeezed his hand again. "I did love you. I do, still. I'm sorry I lied."

"It's okay, Joyce," Hop laughed. "It all worked out in the end, I'd say."

"What made you think of that?"

Hop shrugged. "Something Jonathan said."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, he asked me if you and I ever dated."

Joyce laughed. "Did you tell him you tried?"

"Of course. I actually almost told him I used to bone his mom, so that was a fun moment," Hop said, with a short laugh. "I think what Lonnie said really bothered him."

"What do you mean?" Joyce asked.

"I don't know, he just seemed really put off," Hop said. "I mean, I get it. Lonnie was saying some shit, like he made it sound like he didn't think Jonathan was his son."

Joyce fiddled with her collar nervously. "You don't think Jonathan thinks that, do you?"

"I'm not sure, but it sounds like Lonnie sure thinks that." Hopper looked her over, noting her sudden shift. "Joyce, what's wrong?"

Joyce shook her head, giving him her strained smile.

3. Mother

The smoke curled off her lips as she sat in the windowsill, looking out into the woods that surrounded their house. Her mother told her a long time ago that there was nothing to be afraid of in the woods, but the last couple years had been proof of otherwise.

Joyce looked over at Hop as he snored in her bed. She smiled, gently, thinking of how happy he made her, how safe she felt with him. But she also felt so guilty every time she looked at him. She felt the same guilt when she looked at Jonathan, especially times like tonight when she was reminded of the father she picked for him.

Porky's Diner was unusually slow, meaning Joyce had time to pen her daily letter to Hop, one which she would hover over the mailbox outside the diner for a few moments before tearing it up and throwing it into the trash. She had gotten a few letters from him, but she couldn't bring herself to send hers. In every one, she told him the truth, told him that she did love him. She knew he would take her back and take care of her and their baby and she knew she didn't deserve that. She knew it was because of her that he joined the army and that he left in the first place. The least she could do is leave him alone.

She absent mindedly wiped down the counters, filling her dish bucket with the milkshake tins. Waitressing at eight months pregnant wasn't exactly ideal, but the job let her rent a small one bedroom apartment above the old laundromat, just big enough for her and the baby when he got there. She knew now she was having a son.

The bell above the door rang but Joyce continued her cleaning, giving a careless "Hi, how are you?"

"Shit, you really are pregnant," Joyce looked up at the voice. She hadn't ever really spoken to Lonnie Byers, as he was a couple years older and more popular while she was one of the freaks who spent their time at concerts and smoking during class. The only time she talked to him was the night of the party. Even then, it wasn't much of a conversation.

"That's what they tell me," Joyce said, gathering her composure.

"Is it true?" Lonnie asked. "I've uh...I've heard it's mine."

Joyce finally looked up at him, but only for a moment before she laughed incredulously and looked back down. "I'm sure you have heard that."

"So is it true?" He asked again. "Because I would've thought it was Jim Hopper's. Everyone always knew you two were screwing."

"Is that what you're here for, Byers?" Joyce asked, throwing her towel down.

"Hey, look, I'm sorry," Lonnie said. Joyce could be imagining it, but she could swear he seemed genuine. "Listen, I've been trying to talk to you for a while."

"It's not hard to find me, I'm in the same place I always am," Joyce said, gesturing to her surroundings, the tables empty save for a few regulars who were as permanently a part of the diner as the booths were.

"I mean, I've been working up the courage," Lonnie explained.

"Well, clearly you've got it now," Joyce said. "What did you want to talk to me about?"

"You haven't answered my question," Lonnie noted.

Joyce sighed and sat down on the stool she kept behind the counter specifically for her. She never thought Lonnie Byers would come and find her, even if the small town rumor mill got word to him that she said their one night stand was what put her in this position. Lonnie Byers was known for his Love Them and Leave Them policy. She figured he was a safe bet to leave her alone. But she also knew she couldn't deny what she said without leaving the other option open.

"Yeah, it is," Joyce finally decided. She couldn't let anyone know the truth.

Lonnie sat at the counter across from her, running his hands through his hair. "Shit," He said under his breath. "I was so drunk that night. I honestly don't remember us doing it."

"Yeah, welcome to the party."

"Do you want to go to dinner with me?" Lonnie asked. Joyce looked at him as if he had grown a second head.

"Do I want to what now?"

"Dinner," Lonnie said. "Next time you have a night off."

"You want to take me out to dinner?" Joyce asked.

"Yeah, I mean," Lonnie shrugged. "You're having my baby, might as well feed you."

"It's late, babe," Hop said, startling Joyce. "Get back in bed."

Joyce was going to argue but the chill from the window was starting to get to her anyways. She climbed back in next to Hop, letting him wrap her up in his arms, his body almost on fire compared to the cold bedroom. She buried her face in his chest and he held her tightly, rubbing small circles into her back.

Usually his embrace made every trouble she had fade. Even after nightmares of what they faced together in the dark, shadowy Upside Down, he could calm her. But now, it just made her feel ashamed. Tears formed and fell before she could stop them.

"Hey," Hop said gently. "What's wrong?"

"I lied to you," She sobbed into his chest. "I lied. We aren't supposed to lie to each other."

"Lied about what, Joyce?" Hop asked, still holding her closely. "You sound like the kids."

"You were going to stay here for me," Joyce said. "I didn't want you to get stuck in Hawkins because of me."

"What are you talking about?" Hop asked.

"When I told you I was pregnant."

"I know, Joyce, I know you love me, it's okay," Hop laughed with relief. "I left Hawkins, remember? Got shot in Nam and then went to

New York. I still ended up here in Hawkins with you. If you ask me, it was a fine choice."

"No, you don't understand," Joyce said. "I lied about Lonnie."

"What do you mean, you lied about Lonnie?" Hop asked.

"We didn't have sex," She explained. "Well, we did, obviously, I have Will. But we didn't have sex at the party that night."

"You...didn't have sex with Lonnie?" Hop asked, sounding as if he had been hit with a frying pan and was counting cartoon birds around his head.

"He was too drunk," Joyce said. "We kissed but we didn't have sex."

"Why did you tell me you did then?"

"Because I heard you made out with Chrissy Carpenter and I was jealous, I don't know, I was seventeen and dumb."

"You didn't have sex with Lonnie," Hop repeated as if trying to make the information stick.

"Lonnie was right, tonight," Joyce said, slowly. "I think he's always known. That's why he treats Jonathan the way he does. And why he's never liked you."

"Jonathan isn't his," Hop concluded.

"Jonathan isn't his," Joyce confirmed.

Joyce counted the ticks from Hop's watch in the silence. It was only a minute but it felt like hours had passed before Hop spoke again. "Joyce," He said, his voice hoarse. "Is Jonathan my son?"

"I think you already know the answer to that."

4. Family

Summary for the Chapter:

Well, I had planned on this being only three chapters, but due to popular demand, I decided to add this fourth and final chapter. Thanks so much for reading! -Love, James.

The giggles from Will's room woke him up, but it was the muttering from the kitchen that really drew Jonathan's attention. He looked at the clock, three am. Jonathan had heard his mom and Hop going to bed hours ago and it was too early for Hop to be sneaking out of the bedroom to go to work.

He felt that familiar jolt of something gone wrong and quickly pulled on a t shirt to investigate. He poked his head in to Will's room to do a quick headcount, finding all six children pretending to be asleep in their random positions on the floor. He then moved quietly to the kitchen. Hop and his mom froze when they saw him in the entryway, staring at him like he had just caught them in a more compromising position than just sitting at the kitchen table.

"Kid," Hop said, getting up from the table. His eyes scanned over Jonathan's face, searching. "It's late, what are you doing up?" He finally said.

"I heard you guys whispering, I got worried," Jonathan explained. "What's wrong, Mom?"

"Oh nothing," Joyce said with a dismissive smile.

"No, something's wrong," Jonathan said, looking from Hop to his mom and back again. He knew Hop would never hurt his mother like Lonnie used to but he recognized the hardness of anger in the chief's jaw and saw his mother discreetly wiping tears from her cheek.

"It's really nothing, sweetie," Joyce assured. "Just go back to bed."

Jonathan didn't move, studying his mom as her eyes flashed to

Hopper who was still focused on Jonathan. "What's going on?" Jonathan insisted.

Hop stepped back to lean against the counter, crossing his arms over his chest. He looked over at Joyce, her eyes cast down at her hands that sat limply on the table.

"Just tell him, Joyce," Hop said, finally.

"Tell me what?" Jonathan asked.

"It's not the right time," Joyce said, ignoring her son.

"Then when is the right time?" Hop nearly shouted. Joyce flinched, making Hop take a deep breath to calm himself. "I'm sorry...I'm sorry, but it hasn't been the right time in the last seventeen years, when is it ever going the right time?"

"I don't know," Joyce said to her hands.

"Now would be great," Jonathan suggested, sarcasm seeping into his tone.

Joyce squeezed her eyes shut, running her hand over her forehead. Eyes still closed, she said, "Jonathan, sit down."

Jonathan paused for a moment, but Hop nodded to the chair, making him realize it was probably best to sit. Joyce took one of Jonathan's hands in her two, staring him straight in the eyes. The intensity made him uncomfortable. He shifted his gaze over to Hop, still at the counter with his hand over his mouth as if he were ready to shout the answer like an anxious knowitall in class but was stopping himself so that Joyce could say what she needed to.

"Baby, I have to tell you something, and I will understand if you're upset," Joyce said slowly. She took a deep breath. "Do you remember when I kicked Lonnie out?"

"Yeah, after I finally told you all the stuff he did to Will and I when you were at work." He wanted to ask what this was about but clearly it was hard for her to just spit it out. He decided he would let her take her time.

"Yes, and I'm so glad you did," Joyce said, squeezing his hand. "But I'm so sorry it took me so long. And I'm so sorry that I let him back in here after Will went missing."

"Mom, it's okay," Jonathan assured her. "It's not your fault. You were just scared. I know you didn't have your dad around and you just wanted me to have mine. It's okay."

Joyce cringed as if his kind words stung. "That's what I need to tell you."

"What are you talking about?" Jonathan said, looking again to Hop, who was attempting to look unaffected but failing.

"When I got pregnant with you, I was young. I was dumb, but I knew I wanted you more than anything."

"Mom, we live in a small town, I know the story," Jonathan said. "You and Dad hooked up at a party and then got married right before I was born."

"You're right, that is what happened, but there's something else," Joyce said, looking down again. "I told everyone that Lonnie got me pregnant because I thought he'd leave me alone to raise you, and Lonnie heard and for the only time in his life, he was decent and wanted to take care of me."

"You *told* people it was him?" Jonathan asked.

"I lied," Joyce said, her voice creaking out. "By the time Hop came back it was too late, I was pregnant with Will, I couldn't take it back."

Jonathan pulled his hand back from his mother's only to hold them limply in his own lap. He looked at Hop once more, this time meeting his eyes. Jonathan had had his suspicions earlier that night but he still never thought it was more than a passing anxiety, a thought planted from an old abuser.

"Lonnie's not my father," Jonathan deadpanned, still locking eyes with Hop. "You are, aren't you?" Hop nodded solemnly and for the first time, Jonathan caught the tears that had formed in the corner of

the tough police chief's eyes.

"I'm so sorry I didn't tell you," Joyce choked out. "Both of you, I shouldn't have lied. I was naïve and I just wanted the simple solution and I didn't want to hurt anyone." Hop had left his spot on the counter, putting a comforting arm around Joyce as she cried softly.

"You didn't know?" Jonathan asked.

"I didn't, not until tonight," Hop assured. "I would've been here for you, kid. I'm sorry I wasn't. I want you to know that."

"Even when you didn't know," Jonathan said. "You still were a lot better than Lonnie was. You've done a hell of a lot more. For me and for Will."

Hop gave Jonathan a grateful smile and for once in his life, Jonathan was actually happy to be with his father.